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Request for Extension of and Additional Resources for the UNFPA Country Programme for the Islamic Republic of Iran

Report of the Executive Director

1. The Executive Director requests that UNFPA's second programme of assistance for the Islamic Republic of Iran be extended by one year, through the end of 1999, and that an additional amount of $1.8 million be approved for the programme. The second country programme was approved by the Executive Board in June 1994 for the five-year period 1994-1998 in the amount of $10 million to be funded from UNFPA's regular resources. It is estimated that the expenditures for the five-year period 1994-1998 will amount to $10.4 million. In addition, additional resources amounting to $1.4 million will be needed in 1999 to extend the implementation of ongoing projects within the programme's framework as approved by the Board. Taking this into account, UNFPA requests that the funding authority for the programme be increased by $1.8 million, raising the total funding authority for 1994-1999 to $11.8 million. The Islamic Republic of Iran is a category "B" country under UNFPA's approach for resource allocation.

2. The primary aim of the extension is to harmonize the UNFPA-supported programme with the Second Five-Year National Development Plan, which was originally planned for 1994 to 1998 but was extended to 1999. Extension of UNFPA's programme to 1999 will also bring it into harmony with the programme cycles of UNDP and UNICEF. In addition, the one-year extension will allow for the conclusion and consolidation of ongoing programme activities in accordance with the new Government's priorities and strategies and to prepare for the next country programme starting in 2000.

3. The current UNFPA programme of assistance is in line with the Government's population policy contained in the Second National Five Year Development Plan. The objective of the programme is to assist the Government in: (a) carrying out maternal and child health and family planning (MCH/FP) activities in peri-urban and hard-to-reach areas; (b) enhancing population awareness through incorporation of population education into formal and informal education systems; (c) strengthening the institutional capacity of government agencies by developing human resources; and (d) integrating women's concerns into all population and development policies and programmes. These objectives will remain valid during the extension. In addition, further attention will be given to implementing the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), including the further reorientation of activities towards an integrated approach to reproductive health, including family planning and sexual health.

4. UNFPA's assistance complements the assistance provided by other donors such as UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank in the area of reproductive health. In this context, UNFPA assistance has concentrated on expansion and improvement of national MCH/FP services and incorporating more aspects of reproductive health information and services into the programme. The programme has also assisted with providing contraceptives, increasing awareness among policy makers of the interrelationship between population and development, integrating population education into the school system, developing human resources and building institutional capacity in the field of population, and ensuring the incorporation of women's concern into the overall process of development planning. UNFPA-supported activities have also played a key role in strengthening the Government's capacity for data collection and analysis and for population policy formulation. Most of the UNFPA projects are nationally executed.

5. A mid-term review of the programme was conducted in September 1996. The review concluded that the programme's strategies continue to be valid. It also emphasized that UNFPA assistance has been utilized effectively. With some adjustment and reorientation, the programme will continue to reinforce the positive trend of implementation of population programmes in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The mid-term review recommended that UNFPA assist the Government to: (a) further improve the quality, coverage and accessibility of reproductive health programmes in remote and hard-to-reach areas; (b) formulate a comprehensive population policy; (c) develop a national advocacy strategy for the population programme and make more effective use of media to promote population awareness; (d) enhance the status of women; (e) improve analysis, evaluation and dissemination of demographic data; and (f) upgrade the capability of NGOs and promote their involvement in implementation of the reproductive health programmes.

Proposed activities

6. UNFPA has assisted the Government to shift from quantitative to qualitative goals and to provide a wide range of reproductive health services through following an integrated approach and expanding the existing primary health-care system. The extension of the programme will help consolidate these achievements and will enable the Government to further improve the quality of services. During the extension period, UNFPA will continue to support reproductive health research through technical assistance and training. It will also help the Government to develop appropriate tools and indicators to be used for assessing the impact of the reproductive health and related information, education and communication (IEC) activities.

7. UNFPA has played an active role in promoting the involvement of NGOs in implementing the population and reproductive health programmes. The Family Planning Association of Iran, which had ceased to operate for some time, was reactivated with UNFPA support. Assistance has also been extended to other national NGOs that are active in the area of women, population and development. During 1999, UNFPA will provide training opportunities to help further strengthen NGOs.

8. Despite the success of reproductive health programmes in the country, in some remote and hard-to-reach areas, such as the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, there is continuing evidence of unmet needs. Due to cultural and religious reasons, contraceptive prevalence in these areas is rather low. During the extended period of the programme, reproductive health advocacy and service delivery in these areas will be further improved. In this respect, UNFPA will assist the Government in increasing the availability of services by strengthening and expanding the existing health facilities as well as by helping to provide mobile reproductive health teams. Assistance will be extended to the Government to develop culturally-sensitive IEC materials to address the specific needs of this region.

9. For some time, there has been controversy over the accuracy of statistics on maternal mortality in the country. UNFPA assisted the Government to undertake a survey on maternal mortality in conjunction with the 1996 national population census. Under the proposed extension, UNFPA will provide technical support to the Government to process and publish such data. There exists a fairly well established reproductive health management information system (MIS) in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education. However, in order to maintain a steady flow of contraceptive supplies and to establish effective management practices, including monitoring and evaluation, the MIS system needs further improvement with additional equipment and training. During the extension period, UNFPA will help procure the needed equipment and will arrange for appropriate training opportunities as well as provide technical assistance.

10. The Government has maintained the availability of a wide variety of contraceptives by utilizing public budgetary funds as well as through resources from a World Bank loan. Nevertheless, there have, on occasion, been shortages of some contraceptives. In view of the adverse effect of such shortages on the country's reproductive health programmes, UNFPA will continue to procure some contraceptives for the Government as required.

11. An additional amount of $800,000 is requested for activities in the reproductive health sector. The total UNFPA assistance for this sector for the programme period 1994-1999 would amount to $5.9 million.

12. UNFPA has assisted the Government to establish a reproductive and family planning IEC centre. The centre, which is affiliated to the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, is now the focal point for reproductive health IEC activities at the national level. UNFPA will continue to assist the Government to institutionalize IEC activities and to develop its IEC strategy. Success has been achieved under the programme in the incorporation of population education in both formal and informal school systems. During the programme extension, UNFPA will continue to support population education in the formal and non-formal school systems, with more focus on specific needs of adolescents as well as on male participation in family planning. In this respect, UNFPA will provide technical assistance to the Government to develop suitable IEC materials and will also arrange for appropriate training courses for government staff. In coordination with the Ministry of Education, UNFPA will try to involve parent-teacher associations in promoting adolescents' awareness of reproductive health-related issues. An additional funding authority of $300,000 is requested for the IEC and advocacy sector. In 1994-1999, UNFPA assistance for these areas would total $1.8 million.

13. Under the second country programme, UNFPA assistance in the population policy sector has been geared towards strengthening the institutional capacity of the Government in data collection and analysis. UNFPA's assistance was instrumental in conducting the country's 1996 census. UNFPA has also played a pivotal role in coordinating the data collection activities among data-producing organizations. During the programme extension, UNFPA will assist the Government to analyse the results of the 1996 census through provision of technical assistance as well as with appropriate training courses in the field of data analysis. An additional funding authority of $300,000 is requested in the areas of population policy formulation, population dynamics and data collection and analysis. For 1994-1999, UNFPA assistance for this area would total $2.5 million.

14. In the area of gender, population and development, UNFPA has assisted the Government in carrying out its policy of mainstreaming women's concerns into the process of development. This has been done through strengthening the Bureau of Women's Affairs as well as the women-in-development focal points in government agencies. Assistance has also been provided to a number

of women's NGOs that have been active in promoting the importance of women's well-being in the process of development and, in particular, in the implementation of reproductive health programmes. No additional funding authority in these areas is required since gender concerns have been incorporated into all programme areas and the financial requirements have been included in those sectors.

15. UNFPA continues to pay close attention to the coordination of its activities with those of other donors, such as UNICEF, UNDP and WHO. It has also been collaborating with the Government and the World Bank in implementation of a primary health-care project implemented under a World Bank loan. The programme activities would be monitored and evaluated according to standard UNFPA procedures and guidelines. The programme resources would be distributed as follows (in millions of $):

	Approved by Executive Board 1994-1998	Estimated expenditures 1994-1998	Additional spending authority 1999	Total 1994-1999
Maternal & child health and family planning	4.5	5.1	0.8	5.9
Information, education and communication	1.4	1.5	0.3	1.8
Data collection and analysis	1.3	1.4	0.3	1.7
Population dynamics	0.9	1.0	-	1.0
Women, population and development	1.5	1.4	-	1.4
Reserve	0.4	-	-	-
Total	10.0	10.4	1.4	11.8

Recommendation

16. The Executive Director recommends that the Executive Board approve the extension of the second programme of assistance for the Islamic Republic of Iran through the end of 1999 and increase the funding authority by $1.8 million, raising the total funding authority of the programme to $11.8 million, all from UNFPA's regular resources.

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